



TIME TO IMPROVE

# U.S. Defense Structure

FOR THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

By CRAIG A. DEARE

**A**s the Nation adjusts to the reality of the Obama administration, the time is ripe for a fundamental improvement in the Pentagon's relationship with its counterparts in the Western Hemisphere. It should be acknowledged that U.S. foreign policy in general, and defense policy in particular, is not routinely engaged in matters of importance to the nations of the hemisphere. Given the nature of a globalized world, and the fact that the United States is no longer the only security option available to the region's actors, American policymakers must work to remain relevant and engaged with those open to being our partners.

This article runs the risk of being a bit "inside baseball" regarding U.S. defense policy toward the region as it seeks to explain the primary structural shortcomings associated with both the formulation and execution of policy. It does not recommend specific policies for particular countries or concerns; rather, it is intended to address matters of

structure and process. There are a number of reasons why the quality and level of Department of Defense (DOD) engagement with the nations of this hemisphere have been suboptimal. Among these, the current organizational structure within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Unified Command Plan (UCP) for this hemisphere is the result (not the cause) of key factors responsible for our traditional inattention. At the end of the day, however, key structural changes within OSD and in the current UCP are required to significantly improve the quality of DOD policy formulation and security cooperation with the partner nations of the Western Hemisphere. This is not to suggest that structural changes alone are necessary; clearly, sound policy requires informed analysis and wise decisionmaking. As Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson stated, "Good national security policy requires both good policymakers and good policy machinery."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one cannot be divorced from the other, but the focus here is on the machinery.

It is important to understand the context in which this effect has occurred to make the decisions necessary to correct the structural shortcomings. For reasons that will

be addressed briefly, the geopolitical realities at play in this part of the world are serious and troublesome. They will not disappear in the short term, but they will require the dedication of time and attention by senior defense decisionmakers sooner rather than later.

## A Current Snapshot of Defense Concerns

Prior to delving into DOD structural shortcomings, we must address why it is more important than ever to have a more effective configuration of assets to engage the region. Space limitations preclude addressing all 35 countries of the hemisphere, but make no mistake—the security issues at play in this part of the world represent real and present dangers, and DOD has an important role to play. This is particularly true given the department's recent policy of elevating stability operations to the same priority level as those related to combat, and the reality that the region presents a target-rich environment for the entire range of tasks involved in those operations.

The notion of threats, challenges, and other concerns represents the consensus language that emerged from the Conference

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on Hemispheric Security in Mexico City in October 2003. The consensus was required to bridge the wide gaps in regional views among countries as diverse as the United States, Bolivia, and Saint Kitts and Nevis. Classical military threats that characterized the bipolar world do not represent the perceived threats dominating the security thinkers of most countries in the Western Hemisphere. As U.S. security elites think about the region, they must recognize that nontraditional, transnational, and other than state-on-state aggression is the most pressing danger their counterparts there see.

### Transnational Threats

**Trafficking of Drugs, Small Arms/ Weapons, and Contraband.** Although these items are linked, the menace of drug smuggling is perhaps the most pernicious and troubling. The effects of the transshipments of drugs, and increasingly their consumption in the countries of production and the transit zone, are wreaking havoc throughout the hemisphere. The monies derived from these illicit activities are funding the acquisition of greater firepower than is available to local and national police forces, requiring the militaries of many countries to play a direct role. These trafficking routes are also available to terrorist organizations.

**Terrorism/Insurgency.** Most U.S. policymakers equate terrorism with al Qaeda and its derivatives, but the region has its own homegrown varieties. The best known are the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de*

*threats that characterized the bipolar world do not represent the perceived threats dominating the security thinkers of most countries in the Western Hemisphere*

*Colombia* (FARC) in Colombia and *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru. Although Colombia's President Álvaro Uribe has led a successful effort to combat the FARC, that endeavor is not yet concluded. For its part, *Sendero Luminoso*, believed to have been defeated and eradicated in the 1990s, is making a comeback. And while Islamic radical terrorist cells are not known to be operational in the region (yet), there *are* groups present within the hemisphere, some in urban areas. It is widely



ADM Gary Roughead speaks at U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet reestablishment ceremony on board Naval Station Mayport

U.S. Navy (Leah Stiles)

believed that Islamic groups raise funds legally and illegally to finance operations around the world. The Venezuela-Iran linkage is particularly troublesome. As well, there are small groups of insurgents in Mexico and other countries that merit close monitoring.

**Organized Crime.** Listed as a separate entity from the trafficking trio, this term refers to the large number of active criminal networks and their role in undermining societies and governments. In the majority of countries in the hemisphere, organized criminal networks play a debilitating role over the viability of the state. Included in this category are the *Maras*, or gangs, that operate in a transnational fashion as well, generating greater levels of violence and insecurity throughout Central America, Mexico, and beyond.

### Priority Countries

**Mexico.** Although many things are going right in this key neighbor's territory, its security situation is bad and getting worse. There are seven major narcotics trafficking cartels operating throughout the country, generating violence and challenging the very authority of the state. According to the private intelligence agency STRATFOR (Strategic Forecasting, Incorporated), "the 2008 death toll related to drug trafficking reached 4,325 on November 3, far exceeding the total of nearly 2,500 for all of 2007."<sup>2</sup> President Felipe Calderón has given the mission to the armed forces, due to the combination of factors

related to Mexican law enforcement (corruption, ineffectiveness, and no national police force). The watered down Mérida Initiative represents a tepid attempt to address this serious situation; much bolder thinking and far more resources will be required.

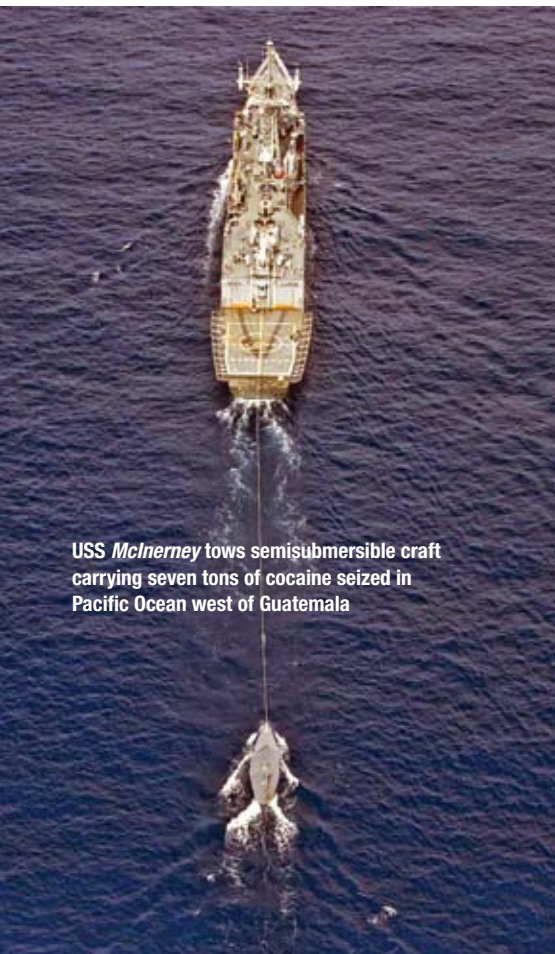
**Venezuela.** Despite protestations to the contrary and words about democracy, this country is a de facto military dictatorship. Hugo Chavez has essentially dismantled any semblance of democratic institutions, and threatens the military balance of South America with planned acquisitions of 4.5<sup>th</sup>-generation aircraft, submarines, tanks, and antiaircraft capabilities. His active pursuit of relationships with Russia, China, Iran, Cuba, Belarus, and North Korea is anything but benign. Matters will get considerably worse before they improve.

**Brazil.** The country of the future is arriving. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has taken on the role of regional leader, moving beyond the potential to the real. Beyond mere economic and political influence, defense minister Nelson Jobim has bold and grand designs for a much more robust and energetic military role, in terms of both new capabilities and leadership. Jobim has created the *Consejo de Defensa Sudamericano* (South American Defense Council), a regional defense entity that excludes the United States. A new defense strategy is in the offing, seeking strategic relationships with France, Russia, and other extraregional actors. The United States needs to consider



its national security interests as it ponders whether to deepen or reduce its defense relationship with this key player.

**Bolivia.** Internal political strife is running high, and although the likelihood of the country splitting in two is not great, it is nonetheless a possibility that bears monitoring. The fact that Hugo Chavez has promised to intervene militarily in the event of civil infighting presents a challenge to the countries of the region. How will DOD react to such an eventuality?



USS *McInerney* tows semisubmersible craft carrying seven tons of cocaine seized in Pacific Ocean west of Guatemala

U.S. Navy (Justin Cooper)

**Cuba.** The question of what happens when the Castro brothers disappear from the scene remains open. This land, the size of Pennsylvania and with 11 million people, is at what the National Security Strategy would describe as a “strategic crossroads.” DOD’s stability operations mission has serious implications when matters begin to unravel. Conversely, should the Obama administration decide to engage the government of Cuba, and understanding the preeminent role of the

Cuban armed forces, the policy implications for DOD could be significant.

**Colombia.** This country comes closest to acting as an ally in the region. The Ministry of Defense and the armed forces have transformed significantly during the tenure of President Uribe, although many observers will continue to emphasize the human rights shortcomings of the government far more than those of the insurgents. To its misfortune, Colombia is located in a less than desirable neighborhood, bordered to the east by Venezuela and to the south by Ecuador. How will DOD engage the Colombian military in the future?

The above limited sample does not fully capture the wide range of challenges that confront the region; there are myriad other vital issues meriting attention. It does underscore that there are many matters of substance calling for improving the structure to ensure they are properly served.

#### Factors Contributing to Inattention

A number of specific factors are responsible—in large part—for the relatively consistent (save periodic crises) lack of DOD attention in matters related to the Western Hemisphere.

**A Dangerous World.** National security challenges in East Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa in

by the Colombia-Ecuador-Venezuela “crisis” in March 2008. Despite the unlikely event of state-on-state violence, the number of both transnational and internal threats and challenges related to violence and crime warrants increasing attention.

**It’s the Economy.** The principal U.S. interest in this hemisphere has long been, in general terms, economic. Washington’s foreign policy has emphasized democracy, market economics, and stability, dating from the Monroe Doctrine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Roosevelt Corollary in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, more recently it has been formed in response to crises. Examples beyond Colombia where U.S. administrations paid significant attention to the security situation include Haiti (1994/2004), Panama (1990), Central America in general (Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala in particular in the 1980s), Grenada (1983), and the Dominican Republic (1965). The recent level of U.S. commitment to Bogota is an exception to this general trend, and was due initially more to an effective Colombian diplomatic campaign with the Department of State and Congress than to a DOD-led effort.

**Developmental Challenges.** The primary challenges confronting the majority of nations of the hemisphere are developmental in nature. The institutional frailty of

### Colombia comes closest to acting as an ally in the region

general, as well as Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, China, Russia, and other locales demand the attention of the Secretary of Defense on an almost daily basis. Very infrequently do issues in this hemisphere call for his immediate attention, and in many important ways, this is a very good thing.

**A (Relatively) Peaceful Region.** The risks represented by national security challenges in this hemisphere seem to pale in comparison with those elsewhere. Canada is a strong and dependable ally; Mexico is an increasingly capable partner; our “third border,” the Caribbean, is relatively stable (though currently facing important internal concerns). The average level of defense spending (approximately 1.5 percent) of the nations of this hemisphere is the lowest in the world, which is fortunate in broad terms. This reflects the reality that the likelihood of state-on-state conflict is low though not impossible, particularly if we are inattentive, as evidenced

many of the democracies, the myriad challenges confronting the societies (from poor educational systems to struggling health care delivery), the uneven character of the economic programs, and the predicament of the justice systems and the rule of law are the fundamental issues that confront the region. These challenges, and the regional governments’ deficiencies in addressing them, have led to the aforementioned internal—and increasingly transnational—security threats. Organized crime, gang violence, and trafficking of drugs, persons, and small arms are the effect. These issues are not resolved with military means, although the armed forces can and do play an important role in dealing with the associated security effects of the developmental problems. In fact, because of the institutional weaknesses of many governments, the military is all too often called on to perform missions not traditionally within the scope of the armed forces.

**Heterogeneity.** Yet another complicating factor is heterogeneity. Nonspecialists tend to think of the hemisphere—to the extent they think of it at all—as Latin America, or perhaps Latin America and the Caribbean. And it is true that both of those “areas” share a number of culturally similar characteristics. But the fact is that there are 19 different

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“Latin American” countries, and 13 different “Caribbean” countries, as well as 14 U.S. and European territories and dependencies. This reality makes the notion of crafting a “defense policy for Latin America” or a “defense policy for the Caribbean” exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, in practical terms.

**Divergent Conceptions of Security and Defense.** A subset of the great heterogeneity is that each country has a different

understanding of the role of the armed forces in its security and defense equation. As mentioned previously, some armed forces are required by constitution to be involved in the internal security matters of the state (for example, Guatemala), while others have been limited to reacting exclusively to external military threats of state actors, greatly reducing their roles (for example, Argentina). Because of these distinctions, the interaction between DOD and the militaries of other countries may be quite different, as in Chile, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. This reality exacerbates the general lack of understanding of the region, making the task of crafting coherent and nuanced policy more difficult.

Having reviewed the reasons for the relative neglect by DOD, the hemisphere is distinct in one critical variable: it is our hemisphere in the sense that this is where we live. It is worth repeating—those who pay attention to the region know this intuitively—that this hemisphere in general, and Latin America in particular, is thus the area of the world that most directly affects our citizens’ daily lives.

To highlight just one of many examples of the region’s impact, U.S. trade with countries in this hemisphere in 2007 was 29.16 percent of the Nation’s total, essentially double that with the European Union (15.22 percent), and more than triple that with China (9.77 percent).<sup>3</sup> The importance of stable economic markets, and the role of security and defense toward achieving that stability, is self-evident. As Senator John McCain said to an audience of broadcasters during his Presidential campaign, “To all of the people and governments of our shared hemisphere: No portion of this earth is more important to the United States. My administration will work relentlessly to build a future with liberty and justice for ALL.”<sup>4</sup> Although President Obama may not have shared the same view, he now needs to get up to speed quickly.

### Addressing the Challenges

These realities did not come about overnight; they are the cumulative effect of many years of inattention and/or disinterest by U.S. administrations of both parties as well as the inexperience, inconsistency,



Sailors conduct security patrol around USNS *Comfort* during humanitarian assistance visit to Trinidad and Tobago

U.S. Navy (Steven King)





Medical team members help Guyanese citizens returning from surgeries aboard USS *Kearsarge*

U.S. Navy (Joshua Adam Nuzzo)

and incompetence of many regional governments. Clearly, the resolution will also take considerable time and will depend on both U.S. and regional efforts. A major challenge regional governments must overcome is a history of authoritarian and military rule, a reality not shared by the United States. Many countries continue to work their way through relatively fresh civil-military wounds, with some efforts actually exacerbating rather than healing those wounds. That said, there are two comparatively simple structural changes that DOD can adopt to fundamentally improve the nature of the defense relationship between the United States and the countries of the region.

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First, DOD should create the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD) for Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA). In essence, this calls for exchanging the configuration of one ASD office with a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) office within the same “directorate.”

This upgrade of the DASD WHA to ASD WHA employs similar logic to that used to create the office of the ASD for Asian Affairs. Prior to the latest OSD reorganization in 2006, Asian affairs were the domain of the DASD for Asia-Pacific Affairs, situated within the ASD for International Security Affairs (ISA) (as were the DASDs for Inter-American Affairs, African Affairs, and Near East-South Asian Affairs). Given the scale of the region and the influence of Asian affairs in general—the cases of China, North Korea, Japan, South Korea, and India, among others—it made good sense to carve out the Asian affairs portfolio and create a separate ASD office. Robert Kaplan argues that a confluence of the experience of three key individuals—Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Myers—was a key factor in this shift.<sup>5</sup> For reasons listed previously, a similar organizational rearrangement is called for in the Western Hemisphere.

A separate but also key issue of this “elevation” is that it more appropriately balances the relationship between the policy-maker’s position and that of the combatant commander. Deputy Assistant Secretaries of Defense are many levels removed from the Secretary of Defense, having to route their recommendations through multiple levels of bureaucrats, most of whom know little and care even less about the region.<sup>6</sup> In hierarchical terms, a DASD is roughly equivalent to a major general, while geographic combatant

command commanders are among the most powerful four-star general/flag officers in the system. Over the years, combatant commands from this hemisphere have routinely bypassed the DASD, consulting directly with the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy or the Secretary, effectively relegating the DASD to a senior staff officer within the bureaucracy. On the other hand, Assistant Secretaries of Defense are four-star equivalents, requiring confirmation by the Senate (DASDs do not require confirmation). An individual sufficiently senior and experienced to receive Senate confirmation as the ASD WHA would be able to establish and maintain clear lines of policy supremacy vis-à-vis the combatant commander.

As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is the principal military advisor to the Secretary and the President, a combatant commander should be the principal military advisor for issues in the Western Hemisphere to the OSD leadership. An ASD WHA should be the individual responsible for providing advice on defense issues and defense policy—a more strategic and broader perspective than purely operational military matters, which are the purview of combatant commanders. As when the Chairman accompanies the Secretary to Capitol Hill, the combatant commander should accompany the Assistant Secretary, clearly reinforcing the hierarchy of the civilian policymaker for the region over the subordinate military operational commander.

On another note, from a reciprocity and protocol perspective, one should not underestimate the impact of the level of the official charged with defense policy for the hemisphere. Most countries were offended when they were informed of (but never consulted about) the moving of the office responsible for regional policy development from the ASD ISA to the newly created ASD for Homeland Defense (HD). Many senior regional officials questioned whether the United States considered their countries as subordinate to the defense of the American homeland, and why regions such as Africa and the Middle East were still within ISA, while Inter-American Affairs migrated to a newly created office responsible for internal defense of the United States. Upgrading the office responsible for regional policy formulation would go a long way toward reassuring the region that DOD assesses it as important. Moreover, this bureaucratic upgrade would enable the Assistant Secretary to interact on par with the other ASDs within the policy office.

USS *George Washington* anchors off coast of Antigua during USSOUTHCOM Partnership of the Americas deployment, 2006



U.S. Navy (Christopher Stephens)

An ancillary advantage of the ASD WHA upgrade is the associated level of congressional (specifically Senate) involvement in Western Hemisphere matters. Senate Armed Services confirmation hearings will require much greater attention than currently exists. Aside from U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) annual testimony, scant attention is paid to the region for reasons already listed. It is also safe to assume that a nominee for ASD WHA would have to be a senior individual with a demonstrated record of experience related to the region. No longer would the office responsible for DOD policy in the area be filled by relatively junior political appointees with limited regional defense experience or expertise.<sup>7</sup>

The “exchange” of an ASD WHA for the ASD HD is warranted. The creation of the ASD HD office in the post-9/11 environment was an effort to adjust to serious internal threats to U.S. security. The reality, however, was that in broad terms, there was little substantive change in DOD policy. Defense Support to Civil Authorities (or

Military Support to Civil Authorities, as it was known previously) is longstanding in U.S. military tradition. DOD’s relationship with the Department of Homeland Security, as well as other relevant actors within the interagency community, does not require this level of organizational interface, particularly in terms of policy. DOD’s role remains what it has long been: to respond to requests from other lead agencies when military capabilities are required to support domestic law enforcement or other agencies. The important civilian policy matters related to Homeland Defense will continue to be performed, but under ASD WHA oversight. Nonetheless, DOD’s primary focus remains external threats and challenges.

This new configuration would be as follows:

**ASD WHA.** This official now receives the same level of support as his counterparts. He is assigned two military assistants (colonel/captain), a confidential assistant, an executive assistant, and so forth. The ASD would move about the Pentagon, as well as

the interagency community and abroad, with much greater prestige, credibility, and authority. The ASD would be supported by a principal deputy and three DASDs.

**Principal DASD WHA.** Among the perks of being an ASD is the advantage of having a deputy to assist in running the office, typically focusing on the Pentagon, leaving the ASD to work externally. In many cases, the Principal DASD is a career member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), not a political appointee. Ideally, this position would be filled with a career civil servant with 20 years or more of defense experience with Latin American and/or Caribbean issues.

**DASD for North American and Caribbean Affairs.** This DASD would have responsibility for two of the most important U.S. partners in the world: Canada and Mexico. Despite attempts to shoehorn issues into the Security Prosperity Partnership, the fact is that Canada and Mexico have different security and defense challenges, and require distinct policy management. The Caribbean, for its part, has perhaps the least heterogeneous



binding among the subregions, with 15 Caribbean Community members of British Commonwealth and anglophone influence. Nonetheless, the cases of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic are major exceptions to this commonality. Moreover, the countries

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of Central America cannot be arbitrarily separated from Mexico, as in the artificial separation resulting from a U.S. Northern

reasons: Colombia, Chile, Peru, and Argentina to name a few. And a key country of significant current concern is Venezuela.

**DASD for Homeland Defense and Defense Support to Civil Authorities.** The office retains its principal functions as it did under the ASD HD. The DASD and his subordinates continue to interface with Homeland Security and other key interagency actors to ensure effective Defense Support to Civil Authority policies.

**DASD Crisis Management and Mission Assurance.** This office, too, remains organized as it was under the ASD HD, performing Defense Critical Infrastructure Program activities as well as conducting the DOD Protected Critical Infrastructure Information Program.

tor shifted from a general/flag officer to a career (typically junior) SES,<sup>8</sup> and the country directors shifted from the colonel/General Schedule (GS)-15 level down to major/lieutenant colonel/GS-13, -14, -15 levels.<sup>9</sup> Equally important, the number of personnel assigned to the office declined, routinely totaling fewer than 10 individuals. Moreover, although the military personnel tended to be Army Foreign Area Officers with genuine regional experience, many (if not most) of the civilian personnel had little to none. To be truly effective, the upgrades suggested must include significantly increased numbers of experienced individuals to pay sufficient attention to the region.

The second structural change DOD can make to change the nature of the defense relationship between the United States and the countries of the hemisphere is to establish U.S. Americas Command (USAMCOM). This action is not a replica of the newly created U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), which was essentially carved out of U.S. European Command (USEUCOM); rather, it merges the Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) functions of USNORTHCOM—essentially those related to the external relationship with Mexico, as well as those non-North American Aerospace Defense Command issues specifically related to Canada—with those of the long-standing USSOUTHCOM. The fundamental reason underpinning this UCP change is simple and profound: *unity of command*. This UCP change eliminates an unnecessary and counterproductive seam between the two existing combatant commands in the hemisphere, and places all counterdrug/ counternarcoterrorism, disaster relief/ humanitarian assistance, and operational and TSC responsibilities for the hemisphere under a single unified commander. While not an original proposal—this idea has been debated for years<sup>10</sup>—it is an important complement to the establishment of the ASD WHA office. For the first time, responsibility for defense policy for the entire hemisphere would be consolidated under an Assistant Secretary of Defense, supported operationally by a single combatant commander.

For its part, USNORTHCOM is disestablished as a geographic combatant command, but its homeland defense operational responsibilities remain in its new designation as a subunified command of USAMCOM. A major advantage is the



Command (USNORTHCOM)/USSOUTHCOM boundary. Policies and operational relationships for Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama must be made in a coherent and consistent fashion.

**DASD for South American Affairs.**

The major actor of this continent, Brazil, demands much greater time and focus than it has received in recent history, not simply because of its physical size, but because of the combination of its geopolitical weight, its growing economic and energy importance, the sophistication of its armament industry, and its ability to change hearts and minds in the region. Many other countries also require attention in their own right, and for diverging

Key functions conducted within the DASD for Homeland Security Integration are melded into the other two DASDs responsible for homeland defense matters, and this “DASD-ship” is disestablished.

A final issue is the quality and the quantity of the individuals assigned to the organization. Over the years, both of these variables have tended to decline. The high-water mark was probably during the 1980s, when a confluence of factors (events in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and elsewhere) focused Presidential-level attention on the region. Nestor Sanchez—a well-known interagency player with years of experience—was the DASD, and he remained for many years. Since that time, the office’s principal direc-



removal of TSC responsibilities, which are largely a digression from the internal missions of the command, the most important of which is the defense of the homeland. The command has been distracted by trying to perform its

*the argument that a U.S. Americas Command span of control would be too unwieldy simply does not withstand scrutiny*

core mission of anticipating and conducting homeland defense and civil support operations to defend, protect, and secure the United States and its interests.

One of the arguments against creating an inclusive USAMCOM is that it would be “unmanageable,” with a span of control too large to be effective. Consider the following facts related to other geographic commands: U.S. Pacific Command’s span of control includes 39 countries, 60 percent of the world’s population, and 50 percent of the world’s surface; USEUCOM’s span was 92 countries and now is 40 (including Russia); USAFRICOM’s span is 53 countries. In contrast, USAMCOM’s span of control would be 35 countries, an expansion of just three countries to USSOUTHCOM’s current area of focus. The argument that a USAMCOM span of control would be too unwieldy simply does not withstand scrutiny.

The consolidation affirms the principle of unity of command, a longstanding U.S. military principle of war. Current joint doctrine clearly states that “unity of effort, centralized planning and direction, and decentralized execution are key considerations when considering organization of forces.”<sup>11</sup> This principle should apply when conceptualizing how to organize the Nation’s military forces to engage with the militaries of the hemisphere. As one example clearly illustrates, drawing an arbitrary boundary in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico—as well as between Mexico and Guatemala—exacerbates significant challenges already present for conducting counternarcotics operations in this area. Consider the following: the newly established 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet, the naval component commander for USSOUTHCOM, has no responsibilities for Mexico, yet USNORTHCOM has no naval component.

If USAMCOM is such a good idea and has been around for years, why has the

UCP not been amended to fix these issues? The reasons have varied, but in essence they have all revolved around a similar reality: four-star equities. Despite divergent views from certain offices in the Pentagon, the Joint Staff continues to support having two separate geographic combatant commanders and indeed to expand USNORTHCOM’s area. This is in no small part due to the excellent personal relationship between the commanders of both U.S. Southern Command and U.S. Northern Command. Left to their own devices, it is highly unlikely that either the Joint Staff or the Chairman would recommend against the desires of two combatant commanders. Clearly, senior leader attention will be required for this UCP change to occur.

due to causes similar to those listed above, and it too requires attention. Although this analysis clearly advocates improved U.S. defense policy and interaction, this must be done as a subset of larger U.S. foreign policy interests in the hemisphere. Absent that, the United States runs the risk of exacerbating the perception of a military-focused approach. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates apparently agrees: “This has led to concern among many organizations . . . about what’s seen as a creeping ‘militarization’ of some aspects of America’s foreign policy.”<sup>12</sup> Getting the U.S. Government to exert greater effort and then obtaining positive results from regional governments will be difficult, but the matter at hand is important, so the effort must be made. Secretary Gates continued:



Chilean and U.S. Navy sailors discuss navigation aboard Chilean navy frigate during exercise UNITAS 49-08

U.S. Navy (Omar A. Dominguez)

Regional realities have evolved over the years; consequently, resolving this challenge will take significant time and effort by both the United States and all the governments of the hemisphere. Among the main challenges for the hemisphere’s governments is to overcome similar histories of authoritarian and military governments. Despite encouraging trends in the 1990s toward democratically elected governments and away from authoritarian regimes, the realities of 2008 caused concern because of a resurgence of militarization across the region.

The matter of the relationship of the U.S. Government with the region is far broader than just DOD. The general lack of U.S. foreign policy attention to the region is

*Broadly speaking, when it comes to America’s engagement with the rest of the world, it is important that the military is—and is clearly seen to be—in a supporting role to civilian agencies. Our diplomatic leaders—be they in ambassadors’ suites or on the seventh floor of the State Department—must have the resources and political support needed to fully exercise their statutory responsibilities in leading American foreign policy. A steep increase of these capabilities is well within reach, as long as there is the political will and the wisdom to do it.*<sup>13</sup>

The ongoing Project on National Security Reform, led by executive director James

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Locher, is one ongoing effort to restructure the 20<sup>th</sup>-century national security system to one capable of dealing with 21<sup>st</sup>-century threats and challenges. The Obama administration should recognize the strategic importance of the region and act accordingly to persuade Congress to provide funding for needed programs. As Admiral James Stavridis noted in his 2008 posture statement, "The U.S., in general, needs to be capable of assisting our partners in addressing underlying conditions of poverty and inequality."<sup>14</sup> Those conditions are shaped by political, economic, and social factors and require greater civilian-led inter-agency efforts, with the military in support.

For defense issues, however, the two previously identified structural changes—simple to articulate but difficult to implement due to a variety of political and bureaucratic obstacles—would give the Secretary of Defense a more robust, authoritative, and effective organizational staff element, coupled with a more coherently organized combatant command/military capability. But these steps in and of themselves do not guarantee success. Well-conceived, -coordinated, and -articulated defense policies for the region still must be crafted, and that is done by experienced specialists. As Senator "Scoop" Jackson sagely concluded during his examination of the national security machinery, "The heart problem of national security is not reorganization—it is getting our best people into key foreign policy and defense posts."<sup>15</sup> But getting the individuals with the right background and experience will call for a stronger and more effective organizational structure. Finally, sound policies require a well-resourced and culturally aware combatant command to execute them.

In January 2009, the Obama administration assumed the high responsibility of formulating U.S. foreign, national security, and defense policy. The risks confronting the administration as it attempts to understand and adapt to the myriad challenges of this globalized world will test its wisdom, experience, and judgment. The Western Hemisphere is deserving of attention as the new administration seeks to reestablish U.S. credibility abroad. **JFQ**

<sup>2</sup> See <[www.stratfor.com/analysis/20081110\\_mexico\\_security\\_memo\\_nov\\_10\\_2008](http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20081110_mexico_security_memo_nov_10_2008)>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Division, Washington, DC, February 14, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> "McCain's June 20, 2007, address on Latin America," Miami, FL, June 20, 2007, available at <[www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/12/21/mccain.trans.latinamerica/](http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/12/21/mccain.trans.latinamerica/)>. Capitalized ALL in the original transcript.

<sup>5</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "What Rumsfeld Got Right," *The Atlantic* (July-August 2008), 64–74.

<sup>6</sup> There are five distinct levels to negotiate before reaching the Secretary: the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD); the Assistant Secretary of Defense; the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; and the Deputy Secretary of Defense.

<sup>7</sup> The DASD as of this writing, Steve Johnson, is a notable exception to the recent rule. He is a mature individual with an established record of policy attention to the region. The previous three—Roger Pardo-Maurer (2001–2006), Pedro Pablo Permy (1998–2000), and Maria Fernandez-Greczmiel (1996–1998)—were political appointees as well, all relatively young (late 30s to early 40s) and inexperienced in the ways of OSD. Taking nothing away from their individual qualifications, the message received by many regional counterparts was that the Pentagon had relegated the regional portfolio to a junior partner.

<sup>8</sup> Most of whom have arrived with scant regional knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> With the advent of the new National Security Personnel System, the GS–13, –14, –15 grade levels no longer apply, of course, but their use here emphasizes the point.

<sup>10</sup> The first formal proposal of which the author is aware was in 1990, presented to then-Chairman General Colin Powell. A more recent proposal was made in the Report of the National Defense Panel of December 1997. See also the recommendations of Lieutenant Colonel John E. Angevine, USA, "Americas Command: Promoting Regional Stability in the Western Hemisphere," U.S. Army War College Strategy Research Project, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Joint Publication 3–0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, September 10, 2001), II–12.

<sup>12</sup> Robert M. Gates, Pentagon press conference, July 16, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Admiral James G. Stavridis, USN, *U.S. Southern Command 2008 Posture Statement*, 20, available at <[www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/files/0UI0I1204838891.pdf](http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/files/0UI0I1204838891.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, 4.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Final Statement of Senator Henry M. Jackson, Chairman, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, November 15, 1961, 4.